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Narrative and Stylistic Strategies in NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory* in the Representation of Repressive Power in Africa

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Abstract

This article examines the narrative and stylistic strategies through which Noviolet Bulawayo's *Glory* constructs representations of repressive power in Africa, focusing on the artistic and technical devices that shape the narrative. Guided by narratological and formalist approaches, the analysis explores how Bulawayo structures meaning through characterisation, satire, irony, language manipulation, and the integration of digital media within the fictional text. The study adopts a qualitative research design based on close textual analysis of *Glory*. The method enables a detailed examination of how narrative techniques function as tools of representation within the novel's fictional framework. Particular attention is given to Bulawayo's use of animal characters, symbolic naming practices such as the Old Horse and other allegorical identities, and the deliberate distortion of conventional narrative realism to foreground political critique. Findings indicate that Bulawayo consistently employs anthropomorphism as a central narrative strategy to construct and critique repressive power. The novel also incorporates digital communication platforms such as Twitter and Facebook as embedded narrative devices, reflecting contemporary modes of political discourse and public engagement. Furthermore, the manipulation of plot structure and fragmented storytelling enhances the representation of instability and contested authority. The article concludes that Bulawayo's narrative strategies extend beyond traditional allegory by combining classical storytelling techniques with modern digital forms. It recommends further scholarly attention to the intersection of digital narration and postcolonial storytelling as an emerging area in African literary studies.

Key words: Animal characters, digital media, irony, narrative strategies, satire.



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INTRODUCTION

The representation of repressive political power in African postcolonial societies remains a persistent concern in contemporary literary studies, particularly because such power structures often silence dissent and limit open critique. In many African fictional texts, writers resort to indirect narrative modes to engage with authoritarian governance, especially where direct representation risks simplification or political sensitivity. However, existing scholarship on Bulawayo's work has largely focused on thematic concerns such as displacement and violence, with limited attention to the novel's distinct narrative architecture. In particular, no study has systematically examined how *Glory* integrates digital media platforms (Twitter, Facebook) into its narrative structure as a tool for political representation, nor how allegory and anthropomorphism function specifically to construct repressive power in the postcolonial African context. This gap justifies a focused narratological analysis of the novel's stylistic strategies. This study examines how NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory* employs narrative strategies to represent repressive power through allegory, satire, and symbolic characterisation within a postcolonial African context.

African postcolonial fiction frequently engages with histories of domination, political betrayal, and state violence, offering literary interpretations of lived socio-political realities. Mbembe (2001) conceptualises the postcolony as a space where power operates through both formal coercion and informal social relations, producing a 'system of circulation' in which authority and resistance are mutually constitutive. Traoré and Akyen (2022) extend this argument to literary form, observing that African fiction often reflects political and cultural decline not through direct reportage but through imaginative and symbolic storytelling. However, where Mbembe emphasises the ambiguities of power within everyday life, Traoré focuses more sharply on literature as a diagnostic tool for institutional decay. Barure and Manase (2020) offer a complementary but distinct perspective showing that Zimbabwean narrative traditions specifically reshape historical realities through techniques that blend fiction with socio-political commentary. Taken together, these scholars establish that narrative form in African literature is never neutral; rather, it encodes political meaning indirectly. *Glory* operates precisely within this tradition, yet it innovates by inserting digital communication platforms into the allegorical frame, a development none of these theorists anticipated

Glory (2022) is a political allegory set in the fictional country of Jidada, widely read as a satire of Robert Mugabe's protracted rule in Zimbabwe and the 2017 coup that ended his tenure. The novel employs a cast of animal characters, notably the Old Horse as the ageing dictator and incorporates digital media such as Twitter and Facebook as embedded narrative spaces. Its relevance to contemporary African literary studies lies in the way it updates the Orwellian animal-fable tradition for the age of social media, while retaining a sharp postcolonial critique of authoritarian governance.

This article analyses the narrative techniques used to represent authoritarian governance and concludes by addressing the guiding research question: how does NoViolet Bulawayo employ narrative strategies to represent repressive power in Africa through *Glory*? It discusses the theoretical and conceptual grounding of narrative strategies in postcolonial African fiction. It then examines how Bulawayo constructs repressive power through allegory, satire, and characterisation in *Glory*.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A central concern in African postcolonial literary studies is how fiction represents systems of political power and their impact on society. This study is anchored on the understanding that literary texts do not simply mirror reality but actively reconstruct it through narrative form. Mbembe (2001) conceptualises the post-colony as a space defined by layered structures of authority, where power is exercised through both formal institutions and everyday social relations. This perspective is useful in understanding how fictional political worlds are constructed to reflect and critique real governance systems marked by domination and control.

Within this framework, scholarship diverges on the degree to which African postcolonial fiction can enact political change. Traoré and Akyen (2022) argue that writers primarily expose the failures of post-independence leadership through representations of corruption and institutional breakdown, implying that fiction serves a diagnostic rather than interventionist role. By contrast, Barure and Manase (2020) suggest a more dynamic function: Zimbabwean fiction, they contend, does not merely reflect decay but actively reworks historical events, blurring the boundary between documentation and imaginative reconstruction. This tension between diagnosis and reconstruction is rarely resolved in the literature, but it highlights a shared premise: narrative form is the primary vehicle through

which political meaning is produced. The present study sides with Barure and Manase's emphasis on creative reconstruction, while extending their argument to include digital narration as a new formal resource.

Narrative form is therefore central to how such meanings are produced. Bal (2009) emphasises that narrative analysis must consider how stories are structured, including characterisation, focalization, and plot arrangement, since these elements shape interpretation. In postcolonial African fiction, these techniques are frequently deployed to encode political meaning indirectly, allowing writers to critique authority through symbolic and layered storytelling rather than direct exposition.

This indirect mode of representation is further supported by studies on allegorical and satirical writing. Barure and Manase (2020) observe that Zimbabwean fiction often reworks historical and political events through creative narrative strategies that blur the boundary between fiction and history. Such techniques enable writers to engage with sensitive political realities while maintaining artistic flexibility. Similarly, Orwell (1945) demonstrates how allegory, particularly through animal representation, can function as a powerful critique of authoritarian systems, a tradition that continues to inform contemporary literary practices.

Further supporting this view, Zito (2018) and Mierek (2010) note that animal and non-human characterisation in literature often serves symbolic purposes, allowing writers to externalise human political and moral conditions. Despite the rich body of work on allegory and satire in African fiction, three specific gaps remain. First, no study has systematically analysed how *Glory* combines animal allegory with embedded digital media (Twitter, Facebook) as a narrative device. Second, existing narratological analyses of Zimbabwean fiction have focused on print-based techniques (focalization, embedded tales) without examining how fragmented information through social media reshapes political representation. Third, the intersection of anthropomorphism and digital narration, where animal characters 'tweet' and citizens 'post' has received no scholarly attention. This study directly fills these gaps by examining how Bulawayo integrates digital platforms into the allegorical framework to construct repressive power. These strategies create distance that enables critical reflection on governance, leadership, and social organisation. In African literary contexts, such

techniques are frequently adapted to address postcolonial political realities in nuanced ways.

Traore (2022) also highlights that satire and allegory remain key strategies in African fiction for exposing governance failure and socio-political decay. These narrative choices are not merely stylistic but are embedded in the broader ideological function of literature as critique. Through symbolic representation, writers construct layered meanings that invite readers to interpret power relations beyond surface narratives.

The literature consistently demonstrates that African postcolonial fiction employs narrative strategies such as allegory, characterisation, and structural manipulation to represent and critique political power. Mbembe (2001), Traoré and Akyen (2022) and Barure and Manase (2020) collectively show that fiction functions as a site where political realities are re-imagined and contested. Building on these insights, this study directly supports its purpose by examining how NoViolet Bulawayo employs narrative strategies in *Glory* to construct representations of repressive power in Africa, with particular attention to how allegory and narrative form are used to interrogate authoritarian governance.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs interpretive textual analysis guided by narratological principles. Unlike critical discourse analysis, which focuses on ideology in language or content analysis (which quantifies themes), interpretive textual analysis allows for close examination of narrative structure, including voice, focalization, and embedded narration as the primary site of meaning. The method is suited to *Glory* because the novel's political critique is encoded in formal choices like collective narration, dream sequences and Twitter excerpts rather than explicit statements.

Data collection involved a systematic reading of *Glory* to identify relevant textual instances that illustrate allegorical representation, characterisation, and narrative techniques associated with political power and repression. Supplementary materials, including scholarly articles, theses, and critical books on African postcolonial literature and narrative theory, were consulted to support interpretation and contextual understanding.

Purposive sampling was used to select textual excerpts that directly reflect themes of governance, authority, and

resistance within the novel. Since the study focuses on a single literary text, the sample size is confined to *Glory*, with selected passages serving as units of analysis rather than quantifiable data points.

Data analysis is conducted through qualitative thematic analysis supported by narratological and postcolonial frameworks. Close reading techniques are employed to interpret the meaning embedded in narrative structure, symbolism, and character representation. The analysis further draws on narrative theory to examine how Bulawayo constructs meaning through storytelling strategies. This approach enables a critical interpretation of how allegory functions as a narrative tool for representing repressive political power in the text.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Narrative Strategies in Representing Repressive Power in Africa

Anthropomorphism as a Strategy of Political Representation

The analysis shows that Bulawayo consistently employs anthropomorphism as a central narrative strategy to construct and critique repressive power. By attributing human political agency, emotion, and intention to animal characters, the narrative creates a symbolic society that mirrors authoritarian governance structures. The use of animal figures allows the text to represent political violence, leadership excesses, and institutional decay in a manner that is both indirect and highly suggestive.

In this representation, repressive power is normalised through everyday interactions among animal characters, which makes authoritarian control appear systemic rather than exceptional. The strategy enables the narrative to expose how political authority is sustained through fear, loyalty structures, and coercive institutions. This aligns with the idea that anthropomorphism functions not only as a stylistic embellishment but also as a critical tool for reimagining political reality through symbolic fiction (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008; Gill, 1995).

A key outcome of this strategy is that political critique becomes embedded within allegorical interaction rather than direct confrontation. As a result, repression is not only narrated but performed through the behaviour of animal characters who embody leadership, resistance, and complicity within the political order.

Satire as a Mode of Exposing Authoritarian Excess

The findings further indicate that satire is a dominant strategy used to construct and destabilise the image of political authority. The narrative exaggerates institutional dysfunction and leadership absurdity to expose the contradictions inherent in authoritarian governance. Through satire, repressive structures are rendered both visible and critiqueable.

The depiction of governance systems marked by corruption, violence, and institutional distortion reflects the satirical function of literature as a tool of political criticism. Satire in the narrative does not merely entertain; it functions as a mechanism for exposing moral and political failure within leadership systems (Abrams, 1999; Thiong'o, 1967). The exaggerated portrayal of state institutions highlights the normalisation of corruption and the transformation of governance into a system of personal gain.

This strategy also reveals how satire operates through irony and contradiction, where official narratives of order and progress are consistently undermined by evidence of decay. The result is a layered critique that positions repressive power as both unstable and self-sustaining.

Narrative Voice and Collective Witnessing

Another key finding is that narrative voice is used strategically to construct collective witnessing of political events. The use of a plural narrative perspective allows the story to be told from a communal standpoint rather than an individual one, reinforcing the idea of shared political experience under repression.

This collective voice functions as both observer and participant in the unfolding political order. It enables the narration of immediate events alongside historical recollection, thereby situating contemporary repression within a longer political trajectory. The shifting between collective and omniscient narration allows the text to provide both breadth and depth in its representation of political decay.

The narrative structure also relies on indirect reporting and retrospective commentary, which contributes to a layered understanding of power relations. Through this approach, narrative voice becomes a mechanism for documenting, interpreting, and critiquing authoritarian governance from within the fictional society.

Eavesdropping, Digital Mediation, and Fragmented Information

The study identifies eavesdropping and fragmented information as significant strategies in constructing political meaning. Information is often introduced indirectly, creating a sense of partial knowledge that reflects uncertainty under repressive regimes. This is reinforced through mediated platforms such as digital communication, where political reality is constructed through tweets, posts, and online reactions.

This technique strengthens the idea that truth in authoritarian contexts is mediated, delayed, and sometimes distorted. The reliance on hearsay and digital fragments reflects how information circulates within controlled political environments. The narrative explicitly captures this fragmentation when it observes that “*Jidada was actually not a country but two countries*” (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 295), distinguishing between physical lived reality and the digital space of political expression.

By structuring information in fragments across oral, written, and digital forms, the narrative mirrors the instability of political knowledge under repression. This strategy emphasises that understanding political reality requires piecing together incomplete accounts across multiple narrative channels.

Dreams, Embedded Narratives, and Multilayered Storytelling

The analysis further reveals that Bulawayo extends the representation of repressive power through dreams and embedded narratives. The omniscient chorus reveals characters’ inner psychological states, particularly those of leadership. The Old Horse’s dreams construct a nostalgic imagination of authority, where he recalls a past Jidada that was “an Eldorado, a country that held so much promise to its inhabitants that animals invited their relatives to join them there”. This dream imagery contrasts sharply with the present reality of decay and repression.

These dream sequences function as ideological devices through which power justifies itself while exposing its fragility. The Old Horse’s self-comparison with global figures such as Martin Luther King reflects how authoritarian leaders construct legitimacy through selective memory. At the same time, such recollections reveal the instability of that legitimacy.

The narrative also operates through multiple embedded levels. The first level is occupied by the omniscient chorus, while secondary and tertiary levels emerge through digital communication and written texts within the narrative world. The chorus itself highlights this fragmentation when it notes that there is a “*Country Country*” and an “*Other Country*” where citizens “logged on and roared and raged and vented” (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 295).

Within this structure, embedded narratives such as Destiny’s *The Red Butterflies of Jidada* and Simiso’s oral storytelling function as alternative archives of memory and trauma. These narratives reconstruct suppressed histories of violence and disappearance, transforming storytelling into both documentation and resistance. The text also suggests the therapeutic function of narration when Simiso clings to the text “*as if it is the very bread of life*” (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 325).

Discussion

The findings extend, confirm, and partially challenge prior scholarship. First, they confirm Barure and Manase’s (2020) claim that Zimbabwean fiction reworks history through creative narrative strategies: *Glory*’s animal allegory clearly reimagines the Mugabe era. Second, the findings extend Traoré and Akyen’s (2022) argument about satire as exposure of decay: in *Glory*, satire does not merely expose but actively performs political fragmentation through fragmented digital voices. Third, the results challenge Mbembe’s (2001) emphasis on the postcolony as a space of ‘conviviality’ and ambiguity; in Bulawayo’s representation, repression is less ambiguous and more systematically algorithmic, mirroring social media’s logic of visibility and silencing. This suggests that digital narration alters the political grammar of the African postcolonial novel in ways earlier theorists could not foresee.

The analysis of *Glory* demonstrates that NoViolet Bulawayo’s representation of repressive power is not only thematic but deeply embedded in narrative form. The novel’s allegorical framework allows political realities to be displaced into a fictional animal society, yet the underlying critique of authoritarian governance remains sharply legible. What emerges from this study is that narrative strategies are not merely aesthetic choices but functional mechanisms through which political meaning is constructed, circulated, and intensified.

A key insight from the findings is that anthropomorphism operates as a foundational strategy for political representation. By assigning human political behaviours, such as ambition, coercion, and loyalty struggles to animal characters, the text constructs a symbolic political order that closely parallels real governance systems. This strategy enables the narration of repression without direct reference to identifiable individuals or states, thereby expanding the imaginative space for critique while simultaneously protecting the text's allegorical ambiguity. In this way, political authority is shown to be reproduced through institutions, relationships, and symbolic roles rather than isolated actors.

Satire further deepens this critique by exposing the absurdities embedded in authoritarian governance. The exaggerated depiction of ministries and leadership structures reveals a system where institutional logic is inverted, and governance becomes a performance of excess and contradiction. This aligns with scholarly understandings of satire as a mode of moral and political correction that uses ridicule and irony to destabilise normalised systems of power (Abrams, 1999; Thiong'o, 1967). In *Glory*, satire does not simply condemn leadership; it reveals how repression becomes routinised and self-justifying within political structures.

The narrative voice also plays an important role in shaping political meaning. The use of a collective "we" positions the narration as communal testimony rather than individual recollection. This creates a sense of shared experience under authoritarian rule, where witnessing becomes both a narrative function and a political act. The shifting narrative levels, including embedded accounts and retrospective commentary, further reinforce the idea that political reality is multi-layered and historically situated.

Additionally, fragmented narration through eavesdropping and indirect reporting reflects the epistemic instability of repressive environments. Information is never fully transparent; instead, it circulates through partial, uncertain, and mediated forms. This fragmentation mirrors the lived experience of citizens under surveillance and control, where truth is reconstructed from incomplete and often contradictory accounts.

The discussion confirms that Bulawayo's narrative strategies work interdependently to construct a complex representation of repressive power. Allegory, satire,

narrative voice, and fragmentation collectively reveal that authoritarian governance is sustained not only through force but also through discourse, symbolism, and storytelling structures that shape how power is perceived and understood.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study set out to examine the narrative and stylistic strategies in NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory* in the representation of repressive power in Africa. The analysis has demonstrated that Bulawayo constructs repressive power through a complex interplay of allegory, narrative voice, satire, and digital media, all of which work together to represent authoritarian governance within a fictional African context.

The findings confirm that allegory is central to the novel's representation of repressive power. Through the creation of a fictional animal society, Bulawayo displaces direct political reference while still clearly evoking postcolonial African governance structures. Anthropomorphism enables the portrayal of political actors as animal figures, making it possible to represent domination, succession struggles, and institutional violence in symbolic form.

The study also established that satire is a key stylistic strategy used to expose the contradictions of authoritarian rule. Through irony, exaggeration, and ridicule, the narrative highlights the normalisation of corruption, political excess, and institutional decay. In addition, the research found that narrative voice plays a significant role in constructing collective experiences of repression. The use of a communal and shifting narrative perspective allows events to be presented as shared experiences, thereby emphasising the widespread impact of authoritarian governance. Fragmented narration and indirect reporting further reflect the instability of truth and information under repressive systems.

The incorporation of digital media as part of the narrative structure demonstrates Bulawayo's stylistic innovation. Social media platforms function as embedded narrative spaces that extend the plot, shape character interaction, and reflect contemporary forms of political expression and resistance. The study concludes that *Glory* uses interconnected narrative and stylistic strategies to represent repressive power as systemic, symbolic, and deeply embedded in postcolonial African governance.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that further research be conducted on contemporary African fiction that employs allegory as a means of representing political power. Such studies should pay particular attention to how narrative and stylistic strategies shape the depiction of authoritarian governance in modern African contexts. It is also recommended that more scholarly focus be placed on the use of anthropomorphism and satire in African literature, as these strategies have proven to be powerful tools for indirectly representing and critiquing repressive political systems. Understanding how these techniques function	can deepen critical engagement with contemporary literary texts. Further research should also explore the role of narrative voice and fragmentation in representing political uncertainty and repression. These strategies reflect how information is controlled and circulated within authoritarian environments and therefore offer important insights into narrative construction. In addition, the study recommended that the integration of digital media into literary narratives be further investigated.
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